



“JUST DO IT FOR HER: A STUDY ON NIKE’S ADS IN PROMOTING WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS”

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ABSTRACT

With a focus on Nike’s advertising strategies, online campaigns, and social initiatives that promote women athletes, this research explores the company’s evolving role in promoting women’s participation in sports. The research evaluates how Nike challenges gender stereotypes, promotes inclusivity, and partners with athletes to enhance gender equality in sports through a critical textual and visual analysis of blog entries, commercials, and academic literature. Nike’s multi-pronged approach to engaging with women is illustrated through efforts such as Dream Crazier, collaborations with influential figures such as Megan Thee Stallion and Parris Goebel, and efforts such as the Nike Athlete Think Tank. Nike is successfully using digital media and emotional story-telling in a manner that changes perceptions of women in sports, and also intersects with feminist issues and traditional values that can appeal to a broader audience. Even so, Nike stands as a leading player in the global movement for sports equity owing to its continuous investments in grassroots programs and feminised innovation

KEYWORDS: Online Campaigns, Nike, Dream Crazier, Think Tank, Megan Thee Stallion, Promote Women Athletes, Nike Emotional Story Telling

INTRODUCTION

Nike, a global leader in sportswear, has transformed from a product-focused brand into a symbol of cultural change and social activism. With the motto “If you have a body, you are an athlete,” Nike promotes inclusivity by challenging conventional barriers in sports related to gender, race, and physical ability. In recent years, Nike has launched several campaigns aimed at empowering women and increasing their visibility and participation in sports. Campaigns like Dream Crazier and initiatives such as the Athlete Think Tank position the brand not just as a seller of products, but as a driver of gender equity. This research explores Nike’s strategies in advertising, product development, and community engagement to examine how it supports women athletes and promotes a more inclusive sports culture, both symbolically and in practice.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Female athlete and women’s sports: a textual analysis of Nike’s women directed advertisements

The 2015 paper written by Kara M Arend explores the representation of women athletes in advertisements, focusing especially on the marketing strategies of Nike. The paper analyses the effects of milestone events like Title IX, the “Battle of the Sexes,” and the 1999 Women’s World Cup, and also the historical context of women’s sport and resistance to gender conventions through a review of research. It examines the way in which feminist values and women’s empowerment among female athletes have been integrated into Nike advertising, as part of broader cultural shifts. Further, the research considers the ongoing issues of lack of media coverage and traditional depictions of women in sport, gaining insight into the ways in which

Nike’s marketing campaigns assist in shifting public perception and enhancing gender equality in sport.

2. Selling truth: how Nike’s advertising to women claimed a contested reality

The 2015 paper by Jean M Grow, Joyace M Wolburg discusses how women’s sports are often suppressed through language and media representation, and how sports have traditionally been seen as a masculine domain. The research delves into feminist critiques of advertising, focusing on how early campaigns like Nike’s reflected and reinforced patriarchal norms. It also discusses how feminist concepts have influenced advertising, calling for stronger representations of women. The historical context of women participating in sports, particularly after Title IX, and the ongoing disparities in media coverage and resources are also brought out in the research. Ultimately, the study calls for enhanced understanding of the ways gender, sport, and advertising combine to shape public attitudes.

3. Stories of Community: The First Ten Years of Nike Women’s Advertising Stories of Community: The First Ten Years of Nike Women’s Advertising

2006 paper by Jean M. Grow “the Nike Women’s Advertising” research study considers the impact and reflection of Nike’s advertising strategies on society ideals in advertisements. It investigates the cultural economy of community formation, symbolism, and advertisement, highlighting how Nike constructs identities and belongingness to 27 appeals to women consumers. Encouragement of hyper consumption, deployment of feminist principles in consumer society, and postmodern

reflection on fragmented identities in global advertising are some of the key issues. Nike's approach is being criticized in the article, which recognizes its success in empowering women as well as its issues with consumerism and coherent message. Ultimately, it demonstrates how deeply identification, advertising, and cultural narrative intermingle in Nike's commercials.

4. The Gender of Branding: Early Nike Women's Advertising as a Feminist Antenarrative

written by Jean M Grow presented in the year 2008 focuses on the interrelation between branding, gender roles, and advertising strategies. It considers the challenges Nike encountered while introducing a women's sub-brand intended to empower women consumers due to its long-standing masculine brand identity. The fractured narrative of Nike's female ads is analyzed through Antenarrative Theory in this study, as well as highlighting the ways in which the company's predominantly female creative team influenced these communications. The tension between promoting women's empowerment and maintaining traditional gender norms is also addressed. The study calls for more research into gendered advertising voices and their cultural impact, contending that Nike's early ads paved the way for subsequent campaigns like Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

- To analyze Nike's role in promoting sports participation among women.
- To examine the brand's marketing strategies and social initiatives that encourage female engagement in athletics.
- To understand Nike's collaboration with women athlete to promote gender equality.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a focus on content analysis to examine Nike's efforts in promoting women's participation in sports. The analysis draws from a range of Nike's promotional materials, including advertisements, social media campaigns, blog posts, and digital videos that specifically highlight female athletes. These materials were critically analysed to identify themes of empowerment, inclusivity, gender equality, and leadership.

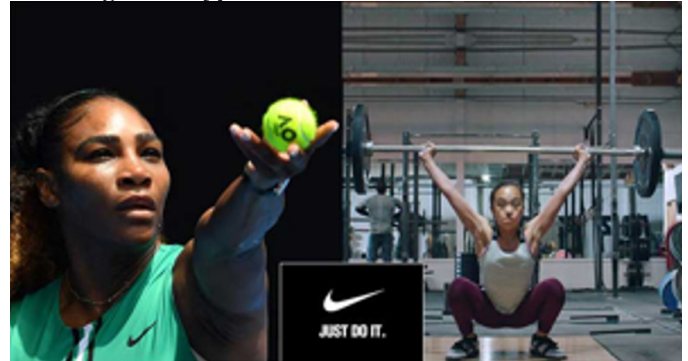
Key case studies included the Dream Crazier campaign, which redefined societal perceptions of female athletes; the Athlete Think Tank, which involved women athletes in shaping Nike's gender equity strategies; and the Let Me Play Fund, aimed at supporting sports access for underprivileged girls. These campaigns were selected for their cultural relevance and depth in portraying women's roles in sports.

The study also examined how Nike's messaging challenges gender norms and whether its branding aligns with feminist values or commodifies empowerment for market gain. This helped evaluate both the symbolic and practical impact of Nike's activism.

ANALYSIS

1. Nike's role in promoting sports participation among women

Breaking Stereotypes:



Nike's *Dream Crazier* campaign, featuring Serena Williams, powerfully redefines societal perceptions of female athletes. By reclaiming the term "crazy," it celebrates ambition, emotion, and resilience—traits often criticized in women but praised in men. Showcasing real struggles like coaching in male-dominated sports and fighting for equal pay, the campaign promotes empowerment and challenges gender norms. It aligns with Nike's broader mission to use sport as a platform for inclusivity, equality, and meaningful social transformation.

2. Nike's marketing strategies and social initiatives that encourage female engagement in athletics.

Social Initiative:



The Nike Athlete Think Tank empowers women athletes by involving them as co-creators in shaping programs, products, and policies that address their real-world needs. It fosters inclusive innovation by valuing lived experiences in sport. Alongside this, Nike supports grassroots organizations through funding, mentorship, and community partnerships, especially in underserved areas. Together, these initiatives build a diverse pipeline of future athletes and leaders, reinforcing Nike's commitment to equality and inclusive sports culture from the ground up.

3. Nike's collaboration with women athlete to promote gender equality

You can't stop us:



This Nike advertisement showcases the grit, resilience, and triumph of women athletes across diverse sports and backgrounds. Through powerful visuals, it highlights women breaking physical, societal, and institutional barriers. By portraying athletic greatness as gender-inclusive, the ad normalizes female presence in elite and traditionally male-dominated arenas. It redefines toughness and success while promoting equity, representation, and inspiration. Aligned with Nike's mission, it encourages the next generation of women to pursue their potential with confidence and pride.

FINDINGS:

- Nike effectively uses storytelling and symbolism to empower women and challenge societal norms.
- Campaigns reflect diverse identities and promote intersectional feminism.
- Real-world impact is seen in grassroots investments and leadership programs.
- However, gaps exist in Nike's internal transparency and in regional representation beyond the West.
- Collaborations with influential female figures like Serena Williams and Megan Thee Stallion help normalize body positivity and redefine what it means to be an athlete across various body types and cultural identities.

LIMITATIONS:

- Feminist messages are often commodified for branding.
- Lack of data on actual increase in women's sports participation.
- Underrepresentation of women in Nike's corporate leadership.
- Minimal engagement with rural or non-Western communities.

CONCLUSIONS:

Nike's campaigns have significantly influenced how gender and sports are perceived globally. Through emotionally powerful storytelling, inclusive representation, and strategic collaborations, the brand has challenged stereotypes and elevated women's visibility in athletic spaces. Initiatives like Dream Crazier, Athlete Think Tank, and community funding efforts demonstrate Nike's commitment to social change. However, while the brand has succeeded symbolically, real

transformation requires deeper investment in policy advocacy, leadership development, and grassroots support. Structural barriers, especially in underrepresented regions and within Nike's own organization, still need to be addressed. This research underscores that when brand activism aligns with genuine, measurable outcomes, it holds the potential to drive meaningful, lasting impact in the pursuit of gender equality in sports.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Researchers should analyse how diverse and inclusive the representation of women athletes is in Nike's campaigns.
- Studies could examine whether Nike's advertising challenges or reinforces gender stereotypes in sports.
- Further research can assess how advertising messages translate into real changes in women's sports participation and attitudes.
- Future studies should engage more targeted methods, such as surveys or interviews, to access direct feedback and evaluate the real consequences of Nike's ads on women participating in sports. This will help transition from general insights to definitive evidence and stronger conclusions.

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